



Digital Divide

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Some countries are 'bridging the digital divide' by sending second hand computers to Africa. What impact is this having on the people in Africa? Is it a viable solution to the digital divide or just a way to relocate old technology? Is the same happening in Bangladesh?


The “digital divide” is the widening gap between those who gain access to different means of technology and those who can't. The digital divide can occur because of a number of reasons: access to training in Information Technology, lack of money for training and to purchase required hardware or the unavailability of resources such as no internet access, quality of computers or trained computer users.

Regardless of the development of technology in the modern world, access to technology in Africa is still insufficient. The development of the IT sector in Africa is still very basic, except for South Africa and a very few other countries. In Africa, there are only about three computers for every 1000 people. There are many people who earn only about a dollar a day and it is impossible for them to buy or attain training in computer technology. Basic training in computers can enhance the chances for employment, higher education and development in any field. It can increase the student's self esteem and confidence. Personnel can construct and print school exams instead of spending money for this service. They can also keep records for all kinds of things and their whole lifestyle can be a lot more organized.


As the need for IT is growing, some institutions are trying to help the younger generations of Africa to gain more access to IT. Computers for Africa is one of those organizations. Computers for Africa renovates older second hand computers, networks them and ship them to non profit organizations in Africa. They send the donated items to the most disadvantaged groups, targeting mostly women and young people and other development institutions. Computer training and access in the CFA technology centers enhances the student's opportunity for employment and “increases their access to information and brings the power of networking with others” (Computers for Africa, 2004) The system used by CFA is an advantage for all. Businesses are commended for donating goods, student volunteers get credit for renovating old computers and learning about international issues. Old equipment is reused and not wasted. “The people of Africa get technology to help improve their own lives and the development of their countries.” (Computers for Africa, 2004)

Reliability is a problem that is associated with donating computers to






disadvantaged groups. Reliability refers to the conditions of the hardware and software. Second hand computers that are donated are not always very efficient. One of the biggest problems is the “inconsistency of the software supplied” (Bildad Kagai, BBC 2003) . The computers that are donated come with different functions and applications. "It's difficult for a teacher to tell where he's going to start teaching computer lessons." (Bildad Kagai, BBC 2003) There are problems with maintenance and upgrading of software. Equipment that is donated in one year is not practical in the next year. Even though old computers can help to increase the knowledge of IT in Africa it is not practical to constantly upgrade the software every year. It is costly as well as tedious. Instead, developed countries can use the money to supply cheaper computers such as the \$100 laptop. This could enable Africa to use computers more, gain more information and it would not be necessary to upgrade the system every year.



Equality of access is another problem regarding the of second hand computers. People can access information from all over the world because of Information Technology, regardless of, age, race, distance, gender, origins, religion or any other characteristics. However, all these characteristics along with the cost are issues that can restrict individuals or groups from accessing information. A mother who is worried about her child's sickness can use the internet to find out information on the illness and find out cures for herself. But being a poor woman in Africa, the chances of her owning a computer or gaining internet access is very low. The wages for the common people are not considerably high, and not everyone can afford computers. The number of computers per 1000 people in Africa is 3 and access to the internet is 1.3. While in North America the number of computers per 1000 people is 511 and the access to the internet is 415. (Computers for Africa, 2004) To solve such a problem, governments should invest more in educating people on IT at a low cost. The more knowledgeable and aware the people become, the better their chances are to get better jobs and lead better lives.



Another social issue that can be taken into account is People and Machines. This refers to the interactions of humans with IT. in this case, the people in Africa need to use technology more in their everyday lives. Statistics prove that most people in Africa are computer illiterate. If people were more educated and had better computer skills, they may able to get better jobs as computer skills is considered an asset in this modern world of science and technology. It is important to supply computers to all schools in Africa, however it would be difficult to do so due to the quality of the computers available. Sometimes computers are not used appropriately “one of the deputy generals of teacher training in South Africa went into a classroom and saw a teacher standing on a PC to reach the blackboard” (BBC, 2003) it is vital that people understand the significance of computers and the benefits that technology can bring to their everyday.

Bangladesh, a developing country is suffering like Africa in many ways. In Bangladesh the telephone density is only about 0.5% which is the main reason

for insignificant internet connection through out the country (Akbar, 2005). According to the “economist” in Bangladesh a computer costs the equivalent of eight years average pay. 43% of the people are illiterate out of which less than 1% has access to the internet. Unless issues like this are solved, Bangladesh will never overcome the digital divide (CIA & WSIS). The use of second hand computers in the rural areas has not been established efficiently yet. The language gap between the rich is widening, so the country needs second hand computers available in Bengali as well. The Minister of Science and Technology said that the digital divide “It can be proven from the participation by the country for the year 2005, when the country hosted programs such as the SoftExpo, and TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Global conference.” Language and literacy barriers are holding back the country, from bridging the digital divide.

Donating second hand computers is a good way for disadvantaged groups to gain access to technology and learn more about the world. They can learn new things, communicate more with the rest of the world through the use of the internet. However, it is vital that people understand the significance of computers and the benefits that technology can bring to their everyday. If the government wants to develop the use of technology in certain countries then they need to take urgent measures. The problem of reliability can be solved by funding in cheaper laptops that don't need to be upgraded every year. There should be more efforts to educate the people of the country about the importance of technology and there should be no discrimination against people who cannot afford laptops. Technology can really enhance the lives of people. Because of development of technology, computer skills and knowledge can be considered a great asset.

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